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New Readings of Old Parables

*NEW READINGS
OF OLD PARABLES.*



NEW READINGS

OF

OLD PARABLES.

BY THE REV.

CHARLES ANDERSON, M.A.

VICAR OF ST. JOHN'S, LIMEHOUSE,

AUTHOR OF "THE CURATE OF SHYRE," ETC.

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new."

TENNYSON.



HENRY S. KING & Co. LONDON.

1876.

141 . 6 . 267 .

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PREFACE.

THE endeavour of this little book is to read the Parables of Jesus by the aid of the thought and reason of the present day, ignoring as far as possible the mass of mystical interpretation which centuries of church controversy have accumulated. Thus it is hoped that these beautiful stories may be seen to acquire a new and deeper force, and a more direct application to our present needs. It is the conviction of the writer that the true danger to religious belief lies, not in scientific enquiry, but in a too great readiness to sacrifice the claims of a living present to those of a dead past.



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THE PARABLES OF JESUS.

THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

THIS "kingdom of heaven," which is here "likened unto a marriage feast," what is it? the after-life, or this life? Most assuredly and most evidently not the after-life, but the kingdom of righteousness in this life. There is nothing more remarkable than the way in which the religious world delights to put God and heaven as far off as possible; and this, in spite of the words of Christ, which say, "the kingdom of God is *within* you."

The loving father, being a loving father, does not keep back his good things from his children as long as possible, but he hastens to give and to give yet more abundantly. What is there of heaven which is not now within the reach of every one of us, if we will but put forth the hand and

grasp it? In heaven we look to see God; do we not see him here? In heaven we hope to be near God; but, now, he is very nigh unto every one of us: "in him we live and move and have our being;" "God dwelleth in us;" he cannot be much nearer than that. In heaven we seek the rest, joy, and spiritual strength which come of God; but do we not seek and find all here? Is it not just because of this foretaste, that we have the desire, the hope of its fruition? Every single act of virtue brings heaven all about us; and yet men say, heaven is put off to the other world. So, of old, the disciples said, "Show us the father and it sufficeth us;" but Jesus answered, "I am in the father, and ye in me, and I in you."

But if heaven is here, hell is here too. We want no flames coming out of the earth to convince us of that. Sin, the devil, and hell are too often both seen and felt and kept company with, to leave any doubt about the fact, in respect of this life. As to the after-life, we have no wish to raise the veil, or to dogmatise about a future, with those who would seem to be sceptics even as to the present.

To continue our story. The king who "made a marriage for his son, sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding, and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants," with a yet more urgent entreaty ; " but they made light of it and went their ways."

So it was with the religious world then, and so it is now. The bidden will not come ; they make light of it and go their ways. That is to say, they stand by their ritualisms, their shibboleths, their theologies, and will not go one step further. Pushing and shoving at the door in a very ill-bred manner, swearing at one another with, of course, the most pious oaths, they neither enter in themselves to the marriage feast of righteousness, nor suffer those that would to enter in.

So it is with the religious world. And, as to others, they go " one to his farm and another to his merchandise." The bodily and material interests absorb the mental and spiritual. Men cannot *make haste* at two things at once. If they make haste to get rich at their bankers, they have no time to make haste to get rich in the gains of righteousness. Unhappily not only England but

the whole “*civilized*” world is, as yet, little better than a Nation of Shop-keepers.

“ And the remnant took his servants and entreated them spitefully and slew them.”

The teacher here is the prophet of his own future—a shameful death on the cross—and of the future of all his followers. Still, men show spite by the old cry, *Beelzebub!* against our preachers of righteousness—our men of science, political economists, sanitary and educational reformers ; against all who think for themselves as free men and not slaves. Still, men slay, and with that most cruel of weapons, the tongue.

“ But when the king heard thereof he was wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.”

Now, who is meant by this king ? Plainly God. Then God is wroth and revengeful. And yet he is a loving father. How do we explain this ? Very readily. The mind of man cannot reach God, but only reach after him ; seek if haply it may find him. But no man by searching can find out God. The thoughts of men and the words of men are far too feeble to reach the Eternal. Hence men speak

—when they speak their best—but blunderingly. They say, God is wroth, God repents, God loves, hates, is capable of changing his purposes if we only do penance enough and cry loud and often enough. In fact, they say God is a *person*; and by this word, person, they connote a *human person*; for we know not neither can we conceive any other.

But after all, there is a great truth wrapped up here. For those who violate the law of righteousness suffer, as those who violate the law of gravity suffer—only they suffer more. Those who come into collision with the spiritual world get a blow, like those who come into collision with the material world—only a sharper blow. And just as the child, through its ignorance of the material world, in striking its head against a table, cries out, “naughty table,” seeing in it a *person*, so the spiritually unenlightened, when they sin against purity, truth, justice, exclaim, God is a God of wrath—revengeful, cruel. And, again, as the law of gravity on the whole works well, although multitudes suffer from its violation, so the law of righteousness on the whole works well. To say

this, is, indeed, after all, no more than to say that life is the outcome of this twofold law, and that life *is*—*i.e.* exists.

As a last reflection on this head. Science—that is *knowledge*—strips off from matter, layer after layer, its materialistic envelopes; and in like manner, it strips off from spirit, bit by bit, its anthropomorphic encumbrances. Each thus becomes laid bare. And both are found in the end to be, what? Neither “matter” nor “spirit,” so-called, but the Eternal One—creator, sustainer, *alpha, omega*.

“Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good, and the wedding was furnished with guests.”

Both *bad* and *good* are gathered into the kingdom of heaven. So says Jesus; as against the pharisees, pietists, bigots, spiritually selfish, of his own day and of all days.

The story of this marriage feast ends tragically enough. One guest is discovered by the king "not having on a wedding garment"—not clothed in righteousness. For him there is the inevitable fate: bondage—"bound hand and foot;" exclusion—"take him away;" darkness—"outer darkness;" sorrow—"weeping and gnashing of teeth."

And all this is acting itself out now, to-day, everywhere around us. Are we so blind that we cannot see? are we so deaf that we cannot hear? do we not indeed feel that it is so?—The life of righteousness, joyous as a marriage feast; the life of unrighteousness, a hell's curse.

THE FATHER AND HIS TWO SONS— THE YOUNGER AND THE ELDER.

THE popular, indeed, universally received title of this story, is sufficient evidence in itself of the one-sided manner in which the religious world studies its bible. This parable is called that of the "Prodigal Son;" whereas it is a history of "two sons," and the teaching lies in the contrast which is drawn between the life and character of the younger and the elder.

Here, as in so much of the teaching of Jesus, it is the unpopular side which is espoused. The, at first, seemingly, utterly worthless son becomes the hero; and he who would at one time appear to be the model of all virtues finds himself condemned.

THE STORY OF THE YOUNGER SON.

The younger son would seem to have been of an active, restless temperament, and possessed

with a passion for adventure. The farming life in which he and his brother were engaged, though congenial to the plodding habits of the one, was insupportable to the other. So the younger "said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living." From the promptness with which the request is granted, it would appear that the father had, at this time, full confidence in his son.

And now we read, "Not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."

What then was the nature of this "riotous living?" That there was sin in it there can be no doubt, and also folly and indiscretion. We have here the case of an impulsive, inexperienced young man, abundantly supplied with money, alone amidst the temptations of large cities. It would have been a miracle if he had not fallen. Yet there is nothing to show but that folly, indiscretion, and a false generosity, might have been the occasions of his wasted substance, rather than deliberate, unblushing vice.

Be this how it may, he did not stop in his downward course till he got to the bottom ; for we read, “ And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat ; and no man gave unto him.”

And now his misfortunes having reached their lowest depths, we meet with a strange expression : “ And when he *came to himself*, he said.” Then all this while he was not *himself* ; and “ *himself* ” was a better, more worthy, or, at least, less worthless self. We were then right in our conjecture that this young man was not in heart, in his heart of hearts, utterly bad. He had been carried away from “ *himself* ” by circumstance ; and now, trouble and loneliness and time for reflection, had brought him back to “ *himself* ,” as, by the grace of God, they have very many another.

It is very difficult to say how far a man carries about with him, at all times, *two selves* ; a better and a worse, or a good and a bad self. And to deter-

mine which of these two is his *true* self is yet more difficult. This problem seems to have exercised Paul a good deal. He says, "That I would, I do not; and that I would not, I do." "Now then it is no more I." Again he says, "I find a law in my members; and I find *another* law." Which then was the true I; which the governing law?

Now let us look at our own experience. Have we not, when standing erect, in the conscious exercise of virtue, looked back at the fallen self of yesterday, wallowing in the mire of some swinish passion, with a conviction of the whole reasoning mind, irresistible in its force and clearness, that that one of yesterday, so sin-bound, be he who he may, was not, never could have been, *I myself*? Have we not even gone yet one step further, and striven to relieve ourselves from the burden of past guilt by the reflection that after all it was not *I*, but, in very truth, some other one that did it?

But, to proceed with our story. What did he say "when he came to himself?"—"How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I

have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son ; make me as one of thy hired servants."

This was, doubtless, an admirable resolution ; but was there nothing to damp it, to hinder its being carried out, to make it, indeed, altogether impracticable ? There would, on consideration, appear to be much. The journey was a long one—"he went into a *far country*"—without food, clothing, or friend to help. And should all these difficulties be mastered, so that he once more arrived at his father's house—no longer his own home—might he not be driven from the very door, and even spurned by the servants ? All this, doubtless, passed through the mind of the young man ; and, had he been weak and wavering, his resolve, which was little short of heroic, would have ended as it began—a mere passing thought of the mind.

But our hero is not unworthy of the part he has to play. We read, "He arose, and came to his father." And this is told in the very next line, as though all had been accomplished without difficulty, on the instant.

And here the story becomes exquisitely tender :
“ But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

But this touching embrace of the father does not weaken the stern resolve of the son. The refrain of the first confession is repeated word for word : “ And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” Such repetition is the wont in Eastern story-telling ; and this simple severity of construction does much to heighten the poetic character of the parable.

And now we have arrived at the climax of the First Part of this sacred drama—the crowning of the reconciliation with a merry feast : “ But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry ; for this my son was dead and is alive again ; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.”

But before we pass on to the Second Part, one

reflection presses upon us, So the doctrines of the Schools are false. The heavenly father does not demand penance, atonement, bitter humiliation. He asks nothing of the sort; only a return of the heart and steps homeward, a coming back to one's self, not a negation of self; he checks the self-humiliation; and when the son is "yet a great way off," his father "has compassion, falls upon his neck, and kisses him;" that is, *God does this*. Such is the gospel of Jesus. But the priests of the churches, Protestant as well as Catholic, close the door against this loving doctrine. "There must be a bloody sacrifice," they say, "a victim, and years of penance." Then, they will open the door—for *God!*—just a little way.

THE STORY OF THE ELDER SON.

"Now his elder son was in the field." He had, seemingly, been leading a blameless life, engaged in the dull routine of his calling, ever since that first day that we heard of him. He was, plainly, one of those young men who are not led away by strong passions or violent enthusiasms, but such as are wont to be set before their

fellows as very models of sober-mindedness and of all virtue.

“ And as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come ; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.”

Now, how is the elder son affected by this news ? Is he filled with irrepressible joy like the father ?—for this was his only brother. By no means. We read, “ He was angry, and would not go in.”

Here, certain words from other parts of holy scripture come to us, unbidden, as is their wont when Jesus is the teacher ; such as these : “ without natural affection ;” or, “ he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen ? ”

“ Therefore,” to continue the story, “ came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at

any time thy commandment ; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

Here we discover that this model young man is by no means without his faults, when occasion calls them forth ; for instance, jealousy and uncharitableness. Jealousy, as shown in this : " thou never gavest *me*, &c., but this *thy* son !" And uncharitableness ; for what just right had he to interpret his brother's life at the worst ?— " which hath devoured thy living with harlots." And yet, curiously, men have ever been ready to accept this statement, although coming from so biassed a source, as " gospel truth" itself.

" And his father said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again, and was lost, and is found."

Here, again, the former words, so full of power, simplicity, and beauty, repeat themselves as a refrain, thus intensifying, if possible, their original

dramatic force, and ending this exquisite Eastern fable in a manner not unworthy of it.

What then do we see to be the teaching of this parable? That Jesus, in his tender, human heart, feels the keenest sympathy with, and pity for, the erring younger son; but that he is, on the other hand, repelled by the hardness and coldness and selfishness of the elder son, in spite of his severely correct life and entire freedom from all taint of what Catholics call "mortal sin."

It is to be especially noted, that the story ends without any hint at a reconciliation between the father and elder son. This young man is, by his own act and deed, left out in the cold.

To conclude. Heaven, if anything, is a place of *love*; no cold heart, no unbrotherliness can, by possibility, enter in there. It is, also, a place of *joy*—"joy over the sinner that repenteth;" the joyless can never set foot on its threshold.

THE GIFT OF TALENTS.

THE story of the talents, in its simplest interpretation, is so self-evident that further exposition would seem needless. But there is another reading, not less true, and very needful at the present time, which will demand setting forth in detail. It is this that we shall now attempt.

The story is plainly constructed on a broad scale, and hence it suggests a broad interpretation. The lord of his servants "travels into a *far* country;" he does not return until "after a *long* time;" the "talent" is a *large* sum.

There is strict justice in the dealing. "To every man is given according to his several ability"—"five talents," "two talents," "one talent."

The lord, in due time, "reckoneth with his servants." Two out of the three had acted boldly and wisely with their trust—"they went and traded

with the same." To each of these his lord said, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

The third "was afraid; so he went and hid his talent in the earth." For him the judgment is, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness."

These are the main features of the story, and it is with these that we propose now to concern ourselves.

The record of the world is that of men, each in his own day endowed with talents—with "gifts differing," according to the era and according to the man. Of these talents the man and the age have to render an account. If this account be good, then there is blessing and joy. If this account be bad, then there is a curse and the "outer darkness."

To illustrate this. Looking to the ancients, we see mankind with gifts widely differing. There is the pastoral age, the heroic age, the æsthetical age, the moral age. There is a Greek life of beauty and philosophy; and a Hebrew life of moral struggle—a reaching after, a hungering and thirst-

ing after, "the Eternal who judgeth righteously." To these peoples and nations this Eternal gave gifts, and "they went and traded with the same ;" as is witnessed by the Greek and Roman classics, and by the Hebrew and Eastern sacred books. The names of the great and wise and holy of those days are household words.

Looking to the middle ages, we find men and nations "afraid," "burying their talents in the earth ;" afraid to use the new talent given them ; afraid of science, of history, of free thought ; afraid of the "hard man," as they called God. "I knew that thou art an *hard man*," says the third servant, in the parable. Hence these ages were "unprofitable," and the men of these ages were "unprofitable servants." And so the ages are called the Dark Ages, and their children are "children of darkness."

And now, how is it in our own day ? Do men boldly use the gifts of their lord, and "trade with them ;" or are they "afraid," and do they "bury them in the earth ?"

It has been said that if Jesus were now again to visit us, the religious world of to-day,

being so like the religious world of his own time, would treat him as they then treated him ; would call him "antichrist," "Beelzebub," "blasphemer," would "away with him." Can there be a doubt that they would?—if Jesus be indeed the Word of Truth, the Voice of the Eternal.

Jesus was put to death—why? Because, as he said, "men loved darkness rather than light."

The library of Alexandria was destroyed, and Hypatia was murdered—why? Because the "orthodox" of that time, with Cyril as their leader, were "men who loved darkness rather than light."

So it has been all along ; so with Galileo when he taught scientific truth ; so with Savonarola when he taught social and moral truth ; so with the Protestant reformers ; and so it is now.

Yet God's law ever stands sure ; darkness must recede as light approaches.

Men found it hard to give up a flat earth the centre of the universe, and a rising and setting sun. It *seems* so, therefore it *is* so, they not unnaturally argued. Ideas of space and time, and of man's place in creation have developed a little

since then. And religious belief has enlarged its borders, not been overthrown, in the result.

This all came about in spite of the cry of the timid, Hide the talent ; bury it in the earth.

But there was much more to go yet. This outer world, which looks so real in colour, in form, in substance, *just because it seems, therefore it is not.* So truth taught. Man replied, "This is a hard saying ; who can receive it ?" Now, no educated man disputes the statement ; yet he holds, along with it, his religious belief.

To-day men of science and theologians are in battle array as to the problems, matter, spirit, free-will, moral law, God, heaven, immortal life. The timid renew the old cry, We are all about to become materialists and atheists.

Wait awhile ; the light of truth will pierce the darkness here too. To-morrow there shall be unfolded to man a spiritual creed, set free for evermore from the old Popish and Calvinistic errors, in which the teaching of Jesus shall shine out with a beauty, truth, and splendour, undreamed of by man. The "length and depth and breadth and height" shall be seen to be infinite.

To sum up. Still, then, the lord gives his talents to the world. Still wise and good men trade with them. Still, in the result, they get answer, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And, unhappily, still the foolish are afraid, bury their gifts, and find themselves written down in history as "unprofitable servants," doomed to eternal darkness. Still, as Jesus said of old, "the first are last and the last first;" the "believers" *deny*, and the "deniers" *believe*.—"Because ye say, we see, therefore ye are blind."

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR? OR, THE PRIEST, THE LEVITE, AND THE SAMARITAN.

WHAT is the difference between the religion of Jesus and that of the pharisee? Both taught one and the same religion. "What is written in the law; how readest thou?" says Jesus to the lawyer, on the occasion of this parable. And yet surely there is a difference. Undoubtedly; namely that between the letter and the spirit, that between darkness and light. And so it is now. The teacher of the spirit of the gospel is quite another manner of man from the teacher of the letter, and his religion is quite another manner of religion. And further, the religious world of to-day, like that of yesterday, claims to itself all orthodox belief, and denounces its spiritual brother as "a setter forth of strange gods."

The lawyer, in the opening of this parable,

asks Jesus, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” evidently expecting to detect the simple Nazarene teacher in the utterance of some glaring heresy, and thus to expose him; for we read he asked this question “tempting him.” But, for answer, he is sent back to his own law, not indeed to its letter, but to its spirit. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.”

“This do,” says Jesus, “and thou shalt *live*.” Or, as he says elsewhere, “This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God.” According to Jesus, eternal life is the soul’s life, begun here, now, to-day; not deferred to an after-world, according to the unspiritual teaching of many in our own time.

But the lawyer desiring to “justify himself” as a skilled disputer, in the presence of the assembled multitude, or to “justify himself” in his own conscience—either reading would seem admissible—“said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?”

And now the great teacher opens his instruction according to his wont, by a method as distinc-

tive as that of Socrates himself, although of an entirely different kind. He replies by a parable, full of human life and action. He takes the man out of himself in order that he may see himself, and reveals to him his own mind in the mind of another :—

“ A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.”

No story ever opened with a more immediate promise of keen interest; no story was ever more realistic; for did not the hearers know right well that any man journeying along that road was only too likely to meet with a similar adventure. This startling announcement to the assembled multitude may be, perhaps, best paralleled by a tale of highway robbery on Hounslow Heath narrated to the Englishman of fifty years ago.

“ And by chance there came down a certain priest that way, and, when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.”

The priest "saw," but gave no look of pity. The Levite was a shade better, he "came and looked on him," but did nothing. If the Jewish multitude could readily realise the picture of the man who "fell among thieves," their knowledge of the world, and of the professors of religion in the world, both priests and Levites, would not render this part of the story at all more difficult of belief. Probably, like the religious world in these later times, the priest and Levite regarded this man's suffering as "a just punishment for his sins :" "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" There are, alas ! in the present day, by no means wanting, Christians, so called, who will not step out of their way to relieve a terrible disease due to the artificial condition of society, and who, moreover, obstinately hold back the hands of others who would render help, because, forsooth — as they blasphemously assert — this suffering is "a judgment of God." They are, unhappily, too blind to see that, here, nature is but asserting her inevitable laws, in the face of these very "righteous" folk, who are themselves, after all, at the bottom of the whole mischief.

“ But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was ; and, when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him ; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.”

The Good Samaritan—this is the title he has won for himself—he, too, was, and is, thank God, no unknown character in the world. If the hearts of the hearers were moved with pity for the robbed and wounded man, and with disgust at the unworthy priest and Levite, not less were they stirred with just pride and sympathy at the narration of the noble deeds of him who “had compassion ;” not the sham compassion of one who looks and then passes by, but of one who leaves no act of self-sacrificing service unperformed. Which of us cannot recall similar noble acts ; and whose heart is not rejoiced at their remembrance ? Such deeds we name, and rightly, Christ-like deeds.

Jesus having, now, given his story an admirable completeness, turns towards the lawyer, with this almost abrupt enquiry, " Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves ? "

The young man would willingly escape from giving an answer ; for his choice lies between declaring the hated Samaritan—the heretic—to be an " inheritor of eternal life," to the exclusion of the orthodox priest and Levite, or pronouncing a decision which his own conscience, and the too evident judgment of all assembled, would disallow. His ready wit so far saves him that he avoids naming the Samaritan by name ; he replies, " He that showed mercy on him."

Jesus now spares the poor fellow further exposure, but at the same time stamps his lesson with the direct application, " Go, and do thou likewise."

The spirit of Jesus yet echoes these words through the world, and brother goes forth to help brother, in the name of the " Good Samaritan."

THE SEED WHICH GREW SECRETLY.

THE teachings of Jesus are, even to-day, seen to go deep down into human nature, into the motives of man. It is just because they are so well rooted in humanity that they can take such divine flights without becoming morbid and visionary; and it is just because the religious teaching of the present day is not so rooted that it exhibits those very evils in their worst form. The psalmist's words are true, in an especial manner, of the "carpenter's son": "If I climb up into heaven thou art there; if I go down into the depths of the earth thou art there also." In Jesus, the divine teaching is always incarnate. It was left for Paul to say, "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell."

But there is a depth of wisdom in the parables

of Jesus of which men have, as yet, but feeble glimmerings. And some such indications are not wanting in this parable of "The seed which grew secretly." At the risk of being charged with giving a fanciful interpretation, we shall here attempt to set forth what in "broken lights" appears to us.

Our parable stands thus: "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how."

Truth then, goodness, faith in divine grace, all virtues of whatever kind, grow secretly, silently, persistently, towards completeness, when once sown in the heart of man; and this apart from all conscious effort, as by some mysterious hidden law; just as, Jesus goes on to say in the next verse, "the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."

But is this only true of the kingdom of righteousness? Assuredly not. It is true of the kingdom of unrighteousness also. Hence Jesus

says, in words just before, “Take heed what ye hear.” For any seed sown—if it be seed—will grow; tares as well as wheat; thorns and thistles as well as tares.

And this growth follows a law of natural development: “first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, and then”—“the harvest is come.”

And this harvest is abundant—“a thousand-fold.” This last thought carries Jesus along with it, so that from seeds generally he passes, at once, to “the grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth. But when it is sown, it groweth up and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches, so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.”

Hence we have this further teaching, that goodness does not stop, but goes on growing in heart and life, till the soul reaches “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;” till it realises its divine sonship, its joint heirship. And that other complementary truth stands witnessed to also, that badness does not stop until men have

filled up the cup of their iniquity, and drunk it to the dregs.

But it will be said, Surely all these are old truths ; where is the new light, the new philosophy ? We answer, In the doctrine of an inviolable law of secret growth, which is uninfluenced by the conscious will of the individual. The man sleeps, he rises night and day, but the seed grows on, he knows not how ; it " shooteth out great branches " —all before he is aware.

So says Jesus, and so says our latest science. Spiritual and philosophic teaching are here at one, in setting forth a truth, glorious as it relates to divine life, terrible when the seed sown is sin. When mankind have once accepted this doctrine in its fullest results, it will change their whole method of life ; it will modify their enforcement of moral law, enlarge their charity, and deepen their pity for the erring brother. As men love their soul's peace and their soul's life, and as they love their brethren, they will look more to the seed sown and less to the action of individual freewill.

That small seed of righteousness sown in the heart of Abraham, how it grew ! The man died ;

little enough accomplished after all, one may say ; but the seed grew on in his children's children, till Moses came. Moses, like Abraham, saw the promise afar off, and he too died ; but the seed grew on—tares and wheat mixed, as always—till in the Nazarene it yielded fruit, an hundred-fold. And so to this very day. Death does not stop its growth. Persecution does not stop its growth. Death and the opposed will of man are powerless ; as is witnessed in the crucifixion and death of Jesus, and in the persecutions of his followers. All the great convulsions of the world point to the same result. If force could crush out truth, the Inquisition would have done so ; the fires of Smithfield would have done so ; the bigotries of Catholics and Protestants would, long ago, have done so. But no ! praise be to God, it grows ever on, “ as seed cast into the ground springeth up, man knoweth not how.”

Such is the record of the world's history, both Eastern and Western. And so is it in man's life. Behold, now and again, one higher than his fellows in virtue, so that “ there is none like him among all the people.” Whence came these gifts ?

They were sown secretly in the child's life, having their seed buried generations back. They beamed from his eye in infancy ; they gave strength to his lisping tongue to utter truth and shame the devil ; they suppressed the struggling sob in the child's suffering heart. That same love which entwined the mother's neck with its feeble embrace, after a while clasped the bitter cross, on which hung truth and virtue, with man's full-grown vigour. Hence our heroes ! " The seed sown, when it groweth up shooteth out great branches."

And if the world's history and man's life have yielded fair fruit, the promise of an earthly paradise in ages yet to come, there are not wanting dreary out-looks of sin, past and present, which tell their own sad tale. But God's children " await the gentle advent of his Day," having that two-fold trust which comes of spiritual truth wedded to scientific truth : a trust in " The seed which groweth secretly," sown in the hearts of men by the Divine Husbandman.

THE RICH MAN AND THE BEGGAR.

WHEN we see the painting of a really great master, that which strikes us most, perhaps, is the vigorous grasp of the subject and the completeness of the treatment. The mind feels satisfied; all has been accomplished that was aimed at. Hence, in such a picture, we recognise genius, inspiration. And as these are the marks of a great picture so are they of a great poem. Such a poem is that now before us; a poem we call it—a dramatic poem. It was not in the mind and purpose of its author that it should be regarded in the light of a history, or of a theological treatise. Oriental metaphor was not so misread in the olden times. It remained for a later and a Western world to twist and distort the meaning from its original simple purpose.

The poem divides itself naturally into two parts. In the first part, the action takes place in

this life ; in the second, the veil is drawn back and we gaze into the after-world. Each part has its tragic action and its "gulf fixed." In the first part the beggar is the unfortunate one, and the gulf is that which society digs wide and deep to protect its own class interests. In the second part the rich man and the beggar change places, and the gulf is that which hollows itself out between the righteous and the unrighteous, through the working of the inevitable laws of man's moral being.

The first scene is in the palace of the rich man. He is pictured as sitting at his festal board, "clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day." At the gate or doorstep of this palace there was laid Lazarus the beggar, "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table ; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores." This concludes the first part, that acted in this life.

Now what manner of man was this rich man ? Was he vicious, a drunkard, or a glutton ? There is no hint at such a thing. Had he gained his wealth in some questionable manner ? We

are not told so. We are merely informed that he was "a certain rich man." But had he entirely neglected the beggar? About this there is a difference of opinion. Some think he had. But others think he had not. These say, No, he gave him his crumbs; for the beggar would not have been so foolish as to be "laid at the gate" of this palace, day by day, "desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table," if he did not get them. About the moral conduct of the beggar we are told nothing whatever.

The second part is so complete in itself, and so full of dramatic force, that we are reluctant to break it up by comment; we shall do so as little as possible.

"And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man also died, and was buried. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame."

And here we must pause to note the expression, “*send* Lazarus.” The rich man has carried his class views with him into hell; and so strangely are they embedded in his nature, that although he finds himself a lost soul in hell, and sees Lazarus in heaven, in the very bosom of Abraham, yet he still regards him as a menial, to be sent running at his bidding.

“ But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.”

Now let it be observed, that Abraham, in this reply, brings no charge of evil living against the rich man. He merely states the fact that the tables are turned. Virtually, his answer comes to this: You in your lifetime accepted to the full all that the world offered, not recognising any claim of your poor brother, beyond that to your crumbs which you would scarcely have given to your dogs. You had no pity; you stretched out no hand to help. Now, “with what measure you were wont to mete, it is measured to you again;” “he is comforted and thou art tormented.”

Abraham continues, "And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence."

There is keen satire in this reply, and admirable logic. The patriarch would seem to say, You ever recognised this "great gulf" between you and the beggar; nothing would have induced you to fill it up; it is of your own digging, you cannot dispute it. You can scarcely now, in decency, ask that it should be removed. Indeed, that is no longer possible; you and Lazarus cannot exist in the same moral atmosphere. The decree of eternity has gone out, sealed with your own seal.

Even the rich man himself accepts this reply as unanswerable. And now for the first time he shows that he is not altogether selfish. "Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment."

"Testify unto them" of what? Plainly this, of an irrevocable moral law, that he who fixes

gulfs of selfishness in this world, cannot fill them up in the next, even if he have all eternity to attempt it in.

“ Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.” That is, they have the laws of their duty to God and to their neighbour, and the warnings of what comes to those who neglect those duties.

“ And he said, Nay, father Abraham ; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.”

“ And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

In these last words, we have the most solemn declaration of Jesus himself as to the utter fruitlessness of all *supernaturalism* to win back the heart and life to God. This doctrine, from him who is believed to be the Word of Truth, forms a fitting conclusion to the whole. We will not risk weakening its force by venturing any further reflections of our own. It is sufficient to our purpose if we have shown that the common reading of the parable is scarcely exhaustive.

LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD, AND THEIR HIRE.

THERE is a profound philosophy of life in this parable, which the religious commentators hasten to explain away, "as also they do the other scriptures," because such teaching does not accord with their pietistic notions of the ordering of the universe. Jesus faced life boldly, and drew it as he saw it, not as he or we might wish to see it.

What is the history of these labourers who were called to work in the vineyard? We are told that no matter at what hour they were hired to labour, whether "early in the morning," at the "third," "sixth," or "ninth" hour, or even at the "eleventh," each received the same wage—that due for a full day's work. Hence the "murmurers," not altogether without excuse, said, "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden

and heat of the day." And yet the teacher replies, in the person of "the good-man of the house," "Friend, I do thee no wrong;" or in words earlier in the tale, "Whatsoever is *right*, that shall ye receive."

At the beginning and at the end of this parable there stands a motto or proverb; and it is a strange one, seeming to overthrow all moral justice in the world. It runs thus: "The last shall be first, and the first last." It is plainly on the teaching of this motto that the whole story is based.

Now the question for us is but one: Is this the true law of life, or is it false teaching?

In attempting a reply, we will, as before, look at life in its two aspects—the history of men, and the experience of man.

In history, we witness the ceaseless struggle for existence through which the myriads of mankind are doomed to make their way across the path of life from their birth hour to their death hour. At last, for each suffering soul there comes the end; and the man drops out of life exhausted by the conflict, receiving for payment but his

miserable “penny.” Thus mankind from the beginning—“early in the morning” of life—fought the elements, contended with wild beasts, slew their enemies, wrestled with their own souls. Through strange ages—ages of flint, ages of steel, ages of lust, ages of superstition, ages of slavery of body, ages of slavery of soul—men toiled, “having borne the burden and heat of the day,” and got but their “penny;” hardly, indeed, that!

Each generation of men steps into the world to inherit, at once, the fruits of the labours of all who have gone before—the beauty of Greece, the righteousness of Israel, the wisdom of the ancients, the science of to-day. By-and-by there shall come for the world a “ninth,” yea, an “eleventh” hour. And as we have inherited the labours of all who came before, so those who shall come after will inherit our labours and the fruits of the toil and suffering of all who may have come between.

So says Scripture everywhere: “Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.” “To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, shall be taken even that which he

seemeth to have." And so says Jesus here: "The last shall be first, and the first last."

As a teaching for those who are merely thinking of their own interests—material or spiritual, it matters not which, for there is an "*other-worldliness*"—this is most disappointing. But as a teaching for the unselfish, for those who have the mind of Christ, for those who live for their brethren, here is all that the heart can desire. So says Paul: "I will *very gladly* spend and be spent for you." So, in act and deed, says Jesus, when he hangs upon the cross.

So, too, is the law for *man*—as for *men*. He who comes into the world, morally, intellectually, and physically weak, has the hardest struggle. Never one moment may he rest. And after all is over? Well, he was but a poor fool! men say. And if so, yet this was by no fault of his; he did not make himself—"Some to honour, and some to dishonour." Again; the drudge in the field, the drudge at the desk, the drudge behind the counter, the drudge in his profession; there are millions of such, now, toiling all the day through, all the life through; these are the veriest slaves of

their brethren. And what is their reward ? The market-price payment—"a penny."

By whose fault is all this ? By no one's. It is the law of life.

So, too, curiously, is it at the other extreme. Those who would have been the leaders of men to-morrow, are made martyrs by men to-day. There is the cup of poison for one ; the cross for another ; the stake for a third ; the world's sharp tongue, which pierces like a two-edged sword—pierces the heart—for a fourth. To-morrow, for these there would have been a throne and a golden crown. But "to-morrow" is too late—they are gone ! "Ye slay the prophets, and then whiten their sepulchres," said Christ. Yet who is to blame ? Men knew no better. These were "born out of due time," and they must accept their destiny.

But the strong, if not too strong ; and the weak, if not too weak—these inherit the land. Into their laps falls all the fruit, well ripened by other men's labours. To such as these all offer worship. To these one hour's light work—or no work—brings full payment ; while the feeble child and the giant

who have laboured from the sunrise to the sunset of life get their due from the world—their “penny!”

So true then are found those words of Jesus, “The last shall be first, and the first last.” And so true is his story of the vineyard, which he founded upon them.

THE FIG-TREE AND ITS FRUIT.

THE teaching of this parable is plain: as the fig-tree "planted in the vineyard," so is man "born into the world." The tree must "in due season" yield fruit; so must the man. If the tree, after a while, having had the opportunity of trees, "bear fruit, well; if not, then cut it down." And man, if he bear fruit, well; if not "he shall likewise perish."

Jesus, when he teaches, seizes some fact in life, and brings it to the front, setting it in bold relief. If by this means he, for the time, shuts out some other side, it does not trouble him. Everything cannot be made prominent at once. Colour is lost when all light is blended. Our teachers of every school of thought forget this; but most of all do our religious teachers forget it.

Let us try to look at the doctrine here set forth, with some singleness of purpose.

A man, then, is put into the world, not to live from day to day in the full free enjoyment of his own selfish existence, but to yield fruit for others : this must be his one end and aim and hope. To live for self and yield no service is to be accursed. To live for others, to leave men better for having dwelt amongst them, to live in the future of humanity by some new light of truth given, by some new motive of virtue imparted, by some new exercise of grace wrought in the world—this is the eternal law of man's moral being.

But men reply to this doctrine, The motive is not strong enough ; it is absurd to talk of the “ enthusiasm of humanity ;” a motive, *i.e.* that which will *move* a man, must have in it a selfish outcome ; either pleasure and place here—Mammon ; or pleasure and place hereafter—Paradise : a man, to work, must have his *sop* ; if not from the devil, then from God.

If we quote Paul to these men : “ I would that I were accursed for my brethren's sakes,” they answer, This is but a form of speech ; he did not

mean his words. If we quote Jesus in his life and in his death, they fall back on the argument of his supernaturalism.

But there are not wanting those who think they see in this teaching of Jesus, namely that man, like the fig-tree, lives but to yield fruit, the highest conceivable motive for endeavour, and, indeed, the highest conceivable reward. There are some men, and these not the least wise or worthy, who read the whole history of the world as one unbroken testimony to this principle of action. So far from fearing that the "enthusiasm of humanity" will prove weak in its results, these believe that it will supply a motive power in the spiritual world to which the application of science in the physical world, wonderful as that is, affords no kind of parallel.

Such men hold that the application of this principle to life, on all its sides, will create nothing short of a complete revolution, both in individual and social morals. For the motive of all action will be changed from the *egoistic* to the *altruistic*; as John puts it, "We have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren."

But is the “Enthusiasm of humanity” an all-embracing title for this doctrine? We think not. Man is assuredly not the measure of all things. If man lives only for his fellow-man, is this enough? Is there to be no thought, or labour, or care, or love for the whole world, teeming with life, organic and inorganic: a life which is a part of our life, akin to ours, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, dust of our dust? Here, men of science are rapidly unfolding to us a grand, new revelation. There is one law, one life, one source, “one beginning and end to all,” says Solomon. The breathing of the plant is but a feebler breath of man; its blood is but a whiter blood; its accomplished end is our highest aim—fruit. It, too, has its laws of sex and of offspring.

In bird and beast and fish, all is still higher and closer akin to man. How much suffering do they not bear for us, and how much service do they not render us; what lessons in art, music, poetry, morals, and, indeed, intellectual wisdom, do they not impart. For all this have they no claim? Our own varied cries of pleasure and pain; our

hopes and fears, loves and hates, aims and strivings, all find their birth-place here !

But men are unwilling to recognise their kinship and common origin, and their dependence on the past ; and hence they fail to see their fair promise in the future. Yet here, in this very truth, lies the secret of our parable. If the present, in all its wealth, is but the garnered fruit of a feebler past, what abundant harvests may not the future bring forth !

We look for a new heaven and a new earth, not through miracle, but through the working out of an eternal law of growth, of fruit-bearing ; a law true in the highest and in the lowest, in the fig-tree and in the saviours of men ; a law which ever works, unhasting yet unresting, “whether we will hear or whether we will forbear ;” but a law which slays that which will not yield to it : “ If it bear fruit, well ; and if not, then cut it down. Why cumbereth it the ground ? ”

And who of us would have it otherwise ? The morbid sentimentality of the day, which shrinks from “ the suffering of this present time, which is not worthy to be compared with the glory which

shall be revealed in us," has no sympathy from generous minds. Out of evil to bring forth good, out of suffering to bring forth joy, this is the grand law of life; and till a man has learnt to love the labour and suffering which enable him to bring forth fruit for his brother and for the world, his spiritual aspirations are but as an empty dream.

GOODLY PEARLS.

THE merchant-man, in this parable, who made it his life's object to "seek goodly pearls," when at last "he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had"—all his other pearls—"and bought it." He would not have acted thus when he first started in the business, for two reasons: it must take him time to learn the relative value of pearls, to know which was the "one pearl of great price;" and it is only by continued exercise that the desire for their possession would become developed.

The conduct of this merchant-man is in complete accordance with the general rule of life. All men soon set about getting together, acquiring "goodly pearls," anything, everything which seems worth having. As life passes on, the passion for possession increases, and along with it is developed a higher capacity of discerning true worth.

Towards the close of life the man has found, or thinks that he has found, the “one pearl of great price ;” and for this he is willing to sacrifice all —to “sell all that he hath.”

The children of men, therefore, are like unto this merchant-man. All life-interest is pearl-seeking. The foolish, as well as the wise, are engaged in this one search. But all do not find the “goodly pearls,” and still fewer find the “one pearl of great price.” Should a man weary of his quest, or lose faith in the existence of life’s pearls, he becomes as one dead, as one lost to life. On the other hand, if his quest be keen, and his judgment sound, then he is the hero of his day—his hand is on the key of paradise.

Further, each age has its own estimate of the “goodly pearls ;” indeed it is wise and well that all men, in all times, should not follow the same quest. For one age, valour is the “pearl of great price” without which the world cannot be won. But, valour gained, there now come the “goodly pearls” beauty and peace. To these are presently added the pearls of virtue, moral heroism. Here, again, all are not of the same worth ; hence, Paul

says, "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity."

In Christ then, it will be said, the quest is ended ; the "one pearl of great price" is found. Not altogether so. The highest virtue demands the highest wisdom, and that men have not yet reached. Christ himself says, "He, when he is come, will guide you into all truth." Now all truth is not yet attained, therefore he is not yet come.

Well may the world be called "children of men." The "children" go seeking ; but with them anything may be made to pass for a "goodly pearl," indeed, for the "one pearl of great price." The Pope has it ; Calvin and Luther, both have it ; every church and chapel, every creed and sect throughout the world holds it tabernacled in its holy of holies. Too often, alas ! all proves but a juggler's trick, a spiritual swindling. Sir Galahad, the blameless knight, who finds the true life's blood of the world, is, after all, but a poetic dream. The Holy Grail is yet far beyond. Men may still go seek it.

And here, science steps in and shows the law

and method of the working of all. Brain-knowledge must begin with the simple facts of nature—forms, colours, sounds, felt by the nerves, perceived through the senses, and then catalogued by the mind : remembered, reasoned upon, ranged all in order according to worth, as “goodly,” “of great price,” worthless. And now we have arrived at the next step in mind-growth, for soul touches soul, and heart heart, and thus from the perception of the world’s life men rise to the perception of the soul’s life. And hence, all the problems of love and hate, hope and fear, yearning and striving, are, in their turn, worked out and recorded. Then, and not till then, the mind of man enters on its final path of social and intellectual advance—an eternity of progress.

Thus, then, it would seem, do the children of men pursue their search for “goodly pearls :” from love of nature to love of man, from love of man to love of men, gaining both zeal and wisdom through their enterprise. And more and more do they get to see that the “one pearl of great price” is *Truth*. Thus, creed gives place to creed, and philosophy to philosophy, and science climbs step

by step into the higher atmosphere of truth—but “the end is not yet.” Many a “goodly pearl” must be sold before that wisdom is gathered in which shall purchase the “one pearl of great price.”

We said, all life is pearl-seeking. The boy, in the first rush of vigorous youth, finds a “goodly pearl” in every impulse to action, in all physical exertion, in the mere joy of existence. To live and move and have his being, to breathe and laugh and use his limbs, all this is to gather pearls. But, after a while, to satisfy his mere animal nature is not enough, and there come new cravings. To become wise, to become rich, to become famed, to seek enterprise and adventure of some sort, this is the youth’s future aim. But here, the choice once made, there must be a further narrowing of the field. For instance, if a student’s is the vocation chosen, the study must be limited to some single branch. And, as years advance, the scholar is seen to cast aside, more and more, the encumbrances of learning, that he may pursue with greater freedom his quest for the hidden pearl. It is only a giant like Goethe that can work a whole

mine of wisdom ; perhaps not even he. And thus it is in all the other life enterprises.

But there are few men whom even this will satisfy. The heart looks out once again for a yet more "goodly pearl," and, may be, finds it in the love of wife and child and home.

Here now, at last, there is rest to man's labours, one might hope. Not so. Only the *real* is, as yet, attained, and the soul yearns for the *ideal* ; the present may be ours, but hope looks for a future. And hence, there is opened out once more a yet further world for pearl-hunting. He whose view is centred in self now finds his treasure in some fable of the schools ; but the larger hearted man recalls the words of him who said, "In my father's house are many mansions," and, forgetting self, sees in the "pearl of great price," a future heritage for the whole human race.

TWO MEN WHO WENT UP INTO THE TEMPLE TO PRAY.

THE *dramatis personæ* of this parable are but two, and the action lasts merely a second or so. The story, both in its physical and moral aspect, stands out sharp and clear, pictured like a photograph. There is the vast, silent interior of the temple ; there are the two men praying, and the words of their prayers seem to reach our very ears.

Now, first of all, let it be noted that neither of these men are hypocrites ; they both "went up into the temple to pray ;" their motive was, doubtless, good and sincere.

We will take the prayer of each, singly, for consideration.

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or

even as this publican ; I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

We have said this prayer was sincere ; the man, we are told, "prayed with himself." But was what he said of himself really true ? We may all be easily self-deceived ; this Pharisee then might be self-deceived. Now everything would tend to show that the prayer was strictly true, that there was no sort of exaggeration about it. There is nothing in it in the least inconsistent with the life of the typical Pharisee ; on the contrary, it reads like a fair average description of such an one. The man was, in fact, "eminently respectable," and a "sound churchman," and this is all that he declares himself to be.

But, further, the truth of the statement would seem indisputably conditioned by the very nature of the parable itself ; for we are informed that the story was told by Jesus "unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous"—or, as the marginal note has it, "trusted in themselves *as being righteous*"—"and despised others."

Here then stands the Pharisee in the midst of the temple, wearing his religious dress, embroidered

all round the hem with holy texts ; his attitude, that natural to one who is conscious of his spiritual " high calling," and justly proud of his right of free access to the God of Righteousness.

We almost think we can verify this picture from our own experience. We fancy we have seen such a Pharisee thus worshipping, and that we have caught just a word or so of his prayer : " God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, as this publican. *I*, a member of the true church, regenerate by baptism ;" or " *I*, a child of God by the election of grace."

We would not have it for one moment suspected that we are speaking in any tone of scoffing or of disrespect of such men ; on the contrary, worth of this sort establishes its own claims, whether the righteous Pharisee be a Jew, a churchman, or a methodist.

But now, leaving the Pharisee for a short time in the enjoyment of those religious ecstasies which are invariably attendant on a vivid sense of divine illumination and spiritual indwelling, let us turn our attention to the poor publican.

" The publican, standing afar off "—in some

obscure corner of the temple—"would not lift so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

Now, was this prayer also true? No doubt it was. This man may have been all that the other was not—"an extortioner, unjust, an adulterer;" he may have never once fasted in his life, nor have given a single tithe. This and worse was the scandalous mode of life typical of the publican in those days. Moreover, the manner of the confession would seem to indicate a conscience weighed down with the sense of guilt. The man, smiting his breast in bitter contrition, dared not so much as lift his eyes to heaven; still less would he venture a direct address to the Almighty; his prayer is, after all, but the expression of a feeble hope: "may God have mercy on me, a sinner."

And here, again, this Eastern fable would seem to demand the full antithesis: self-complacent innocence on the one hand; guilt with contrition on the other.

Which then of these two men, they being such as we now understand them to be, will find himself accepted in the eyes of God?

On this point the Galilean teacher would seem to be somewhat vague. He does not set himself down in his Father's judgment seat, as too many in our own day are ready enough to do. All he ventures to say is this: "I tell you, that this man went down to his house justified rather than the other:" "*justified*," "*rather than*."

"*Justified*," by whom? By his own conscience? Assuredly not; the facts of the case are the exact reverse. By God? This may be implied; it is not stated. No; but "*justified in his deed*," made just; and this, not to the full, only "*rather than* the other."

What then, to sum up, is the moral of the story? It would appear to be this: Of the two it is better to be a sinner and know it, than to be a mere formal "*respectable*" church or chapel "*member*," and account one's self a saint.

LAMPS WITHOUT OIL.

THE story of the “foolish virgins” who “slumbered and slept,” and awoke at last only to find life wasted and “no oil in their lamps,” is, perhaps, the truest and saddest of all the parables of Jesus. When we look closely into life, our own and that of those around us, there comes a horrible dread that men’s supposed activities, endeavours, and usefulness are but, too often, mere restless and feverish dreams; that very many, perhaps we ourselves, have never once been really awake. As our life draws to an end this dread suspicion may become confirmed, till at its last moment the soul awakes to see but outer darkness—no oil in the lamp, and the door of life closed.

The wasted and misdirected energies of men—labour which profiteth not—form one of the saddest aspects of life. And nowhere is this more

true than in the history of religious zeal. The record of the Christian churches is, too often, that of men who have laboured, studied, fasted and wept, alas ! suffered and died, for a fallacy which the next generation has exposed. The truth of one age is the falsehood of the next ; and for this falsehood the noblest of men have sacrificed life—all its joys, all its uses : such is theological controversy. Such, too, are the wars between papist and protestant ; between the witch and the bewitched ; between crusader and infidel. And although ignorance and superstition form a less explosive element in religious life now than formerly, yet we see the same hopeless efforts of men to limit the boundaries of religious enquiry. Who can study the most advanced liberal theologians of to-day without a suspicion, which presently becomes absolute conviction, that to-morrow such teaching will be weighed in the balance and found utterly wanting ? And yet how confident are these men that they, at least, have oil in their lamps.

And as it is with theological dogma, so is it with that which we may be allowed to call moral and social dogma. The very principles for the

maintenance of which the hearts of men, women, and children have bled through thousands of years, are, at last, giving way, and we now see Nature advocating her own laws in the teeth of the conventions of ages. The relation of the sexes ; the conditions of their alliance ; the rights of labour and capital ; the duties of the state to the citizen, and of the citizen to the state: in all these questions the moral and social centres are shifting and changing almost day by day.

If then so much which one does with zeal to-day, to-morrow one would wish undone, who is the man that has oil in his lamp to meet the bridegroom of the future ?

What is it that we do not live to repent ? Let two men get together within closed walls, who dare speak each to the other his inner mind, and what revelations should we not hear ! mistaken life-callings, mistaken marriages, mistaken religious belief, mistaken pleasure-theories and pain-theories ; art studies, literary pursuits, social reforms, once taken up with the fervour of a martyr, now seen " to perish with the using," and thrown on one side with little short of loathing.

But nations, which cannot keep silence like men, loudly proclaim the same tale. What else is the meaning of French revolutions, with their strange alternations from communism to imperialism, and back again; or the ebb and flow of all European governments—conservative to-day and therefore liberal to-morrow—till politicians are found dubbing themselves “Know-nothings?”

Where in the world is there a fixed law? Poets rise and fall in fame like the car of a “round-about” at a fair: this one, because he is at the top to-day shall be at the bottom to-morrow. When art is *gothic* we know the *renaissance* is at hand; unfortunately it is not so easy to pull down stones as to tear up verses. The best hope for the “music of the future” is that it is not acceptable now. And so too in religion; unchanging belief is but unbelief; it is because there is so much of the mummy in “popular Christianity” that Christianity is *not* popular.

But it may be argued that if all else change there is no change in goodness. Strange as it may appear, there is nothing in which change is greater. “Young England” of to-day is zealously

engaged in demolishing its work of yesterday. Moody and Sankey with their £28,000 have hastened the overthrow of their creed by at least a century. Almsgiving and poverty, the cardinal virtues of last week are the cardinal vices of this: we have but to read our old texts backwards. And in personal life, while our acts of stern justice may hold their ground for a time, those which in the weaker moments of generosity we accounted our best virtues will quickly turn and rend us. Who is the man most blamed in the world? Not he who draws back the hand, but he who is too ready to help; for such a fool men have naturally no pity.

Gravity is the law of the material world; struggle for existence and "the devil take the hindermost" of the social; gold of the commercial; but for the man who would have oil in his lamp there is no law—it is a Sphinx riddle; in scriptural phrase, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

TARES AND WHEAT.

WE are not going to discuss this parable in detail ; there is no occasion to do so, for Jesus has expounded it himself. We shall merely take its main teaching, namely this : Good and evil must go on together till the end ; man cannot safely try to separate them ; he may pull up the wheat with the tares. In the end the good shall last and the evil shall disappear—the wheat is gathered into the barn, the tares are burnt.

Who can say for certain, at any time, what is good and what is evil ? Sometimes, indeed often, they are seen to change places ; the evil of yesterday is the good of to-day ; that which seemed to be wheat turns out to be tares, and the tares wheat. Roughly we might say all life experience is that of one long blunder in choosing

between the wheat and the tares. Well would it have been for the world if men had always acted on this precept of Jesus, "Let both grow together until the harvest." Then they would have spared the great Teacher himself, together with that vast army of martyrs which reckons in its ranks such names as Socrates, Galileo, Spinoza, and many not yet canonised, by reason of the ignorance and bigotry of men, no less than those who, as yet, await the time of their coming, first for martyrdom and then for their crowns.

The prize wheat of the world has always been accounted tares ; there is something too distinctive about it ; it does not look like the ordinary crop.

May we not now go a step further and say, not that good and evil change, but that the ideas of good and evil are mainly relative, being in great measure dependent on our point of view, which in the first place is partial, and in the next is human. Jesus himself says that men "take evil for good and good for evil." Again he says, "Why call ye me good, there is none good save one, that is God ;" but in another place, "Be ye perfect even as your father which is in heaven is perfect ;"

and again, "My father and I are one." What are all these seeming contradictions of speech but *points of view*? These considerations are enough alone to account for the many theories of good and evil which have exercised the human understanding from the beginning of time.

But what, after all, is evil? When a thing hurts us we say it is evil. Is it not often well to be hurt? Where would be industry, without the pains of hunger and cold; where virtue, without the conflict with vice; where truth, if there were no error? That good and evil ever grow together—no wheat if no tares—is the law of life. Hence the bad logic of those theologians who would have a God and heaven, but no devil and hell. An inside connotes an outside, and so good connotes evil.

And yet we have said that, in the end, evil shall disappear and good remain. Here again the conception is relative; rather it is mathematical. As truth and light advance, error and darkness recede, to disappear *in the limit*—a limit which shall ever be approached but never be attained. Why never attained? If for no other reason at

least for this, that men having reached the goal of perfection, would, *as men*, be accursed. When humanity has perfected itself, then the end of the world has come. Possibly in the future ordering of things, before that day and hour arrive, the earth will have fallen into the sun, as some men of science prophecy. Then the whole labour of creation may begin over again ; a new heaven and a new earth ; a new struggle and a new victory.

But we will approach this subject from yet another side. We say that truth and goodness grow. How so ? The mind which perceives them grows. First there is the sense of duty to self ; then to those on whom self depends and together with whom self is bound up. And who are these ? The reply comes slowly, bit by bit, as the mind grows : the family ; the state ; humanity. This is not all ; again the answers come : all life—animal, vegetable, inorganic, for are we not also of the dust of the earth ? But yet again the oracle speaks : all time—past, present, and future. And yet once more : all suffering, all labour, all joy. Thus man, bit by bit, gets to know himself to be a part of all—nothing is too small or too distant to

love; nothing is too small or too distant to fear. Thus is developed the moral sense. It is the law of the Eternal, and so it is divine; it is the condition of man's existence from day to day, and so it would seem human. It is both egoistic and altruistic, for self and not-self are in the end one—each is a part of all.

Again, as the area of duty extends till it embraces *the all*, so the sense of duty develops till it arrives at *the just*. Hence it is that the right of yesterday is seen to be the wrong of to-day, and that to-morrow shall assuredly bring a still fuller revelation. Why are men not honest enough to acknowledge a truth so indisputable that every page of history, every utterance of Jesus, every revelation of science re-affirms it?

To know to refuse the evil and to choose the good, is the problem of life. When it is solved, earth will be no longer earth, it will be heaven; and man will be no longer man, he will be God. Hence the blasphemy of those who, naming themselves—or not naming themselves, but being—popes, issue their fallible decrees as though they were the hidden wisdom of Deity.

We will conclude by quoting our parable.
“ The servants said, Wilt thou that we go and gather them up? But he answered, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.”

THE END.



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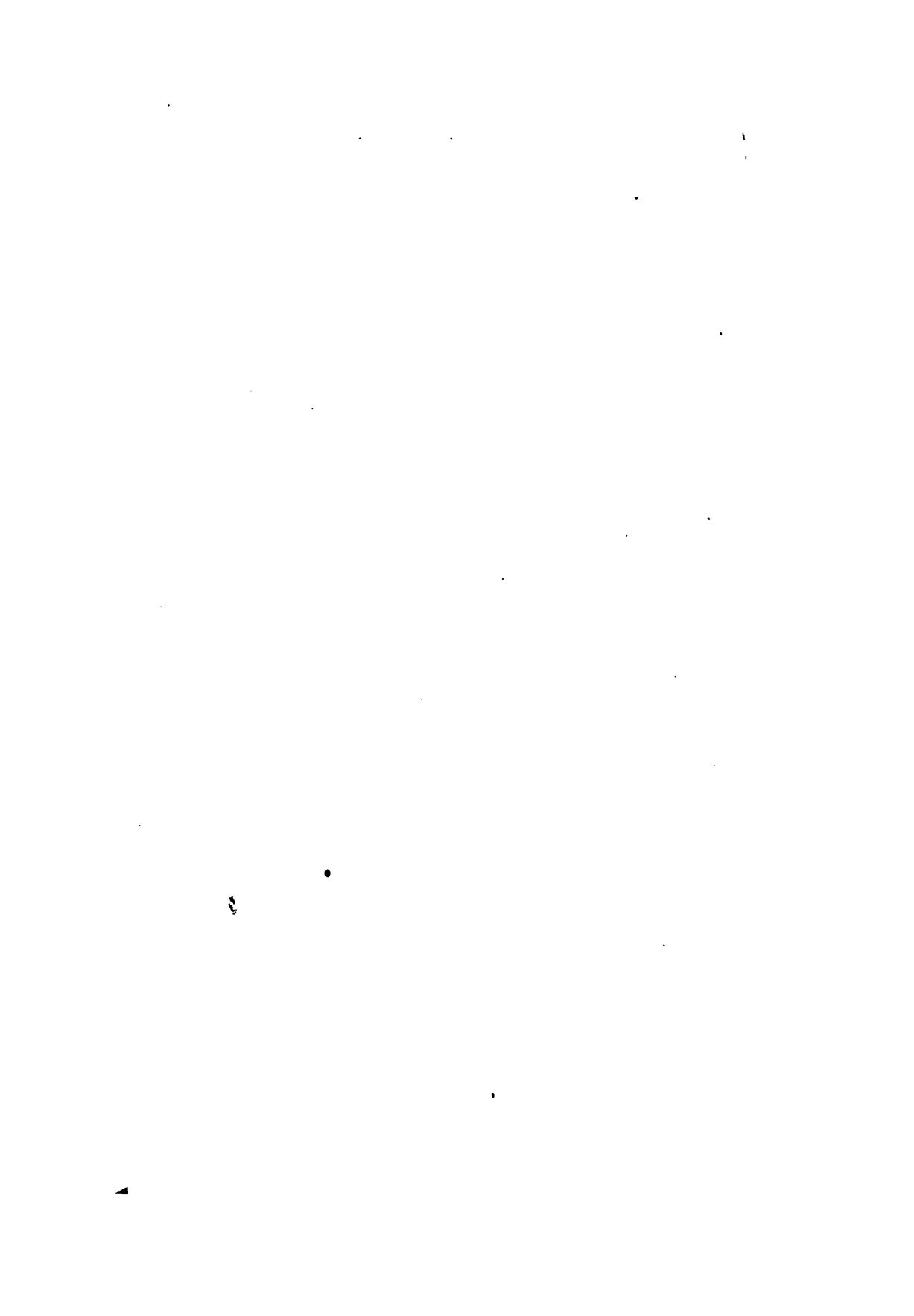
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